

# Dēmos

## Inclusive Democracy Project

### 1<sup>st</sup> Year Analysis

*An Independent Analysis Commissioned by Dēmos*  
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## INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2000, Dēmos is a public policy organization working to build a representative democracy where everyone can have an equal say and an equal chance. Dēmos employs every tool including original research, advocacy, litigation and strategic communications across a multitude of issues to reduce political and economic inequality and to ensure that everyone has a share in the America we all deserve.

Over time, Dēmos' has increasingly promoted an analysis which aligns resources and capacities with values by examining not just which tactics are most effective in advancing the organization's mission, but connecting **the way we execute these tactics** to achieving goals. The Dēmos' *theory of change* has become more explicit that race, gender and economic equity requires not just winning policy change, but a process for winning that engages the full breadth of the impacted community and that embraces and develops the reflective leadership necessary to advance an inclusive democracy agenda. This approach is fundamental not only to values and to victory, it's the most direct way to effectively challenge the tremendous influence of corporate money that has increasingly choked our democracy through a system that currently consists of an almost entirely white donor base that has led to an almost all-white government which systematically results in protections and actions and policies that reinforce economic and social hierarchies that thrive on racism, sexism, and economic injustice. To address this fundamental challenge, in 2015 Dēmos created the Inclusive democracy project.

The purpose of this report is to provide an independent assessment of the IDP program based mainly on direct feedback from its participants. The report indicates to what degree the IDP program goals were met over the course of the first year, what limitations surfaced in the program's execution, and what lessons Dēmos and stakeholders should consider in any next steps.

## BACKGROUND OF THE INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY PROJECT

Dēmos developed and implemented the Inclusive Democracy Project (IDP) in 2015-2016 as an intervention to broaden participation in the field of democracy reform advocacy beyond the traditional set of organizations that are funded to conduct that work. As an expression of the organization's overall mission, the IDP program and cohort bring together three key areas of Dēmos' work: reducing the oversized role of corporate money in politics and guaranteeing the freedom to vote, creating pathways to ensure a diverse, expanding middle class in a new, sustainable economy and transforming the public dialogue to elevate the values of community and racial equity. The project has been designed and directed by Jodeen Olguín-Taylor, Dēmos' Vice President of Policy and Partnerships. Jodeen joined the organization when Heather McGhee became its President, and was part of the new President's mandate to make racial and gender equity core to the organization's analysis and work. Jodeen brought 15 years of experience leading racial and gender justice field building projects. Over the past two years she's worked closely with the entire Executive Team to sharpen the organization's approach to

movement-building and values based campaigning, while building a Campaigns department as a new functional team within the organization.

### **Why did Dēmos create the IDP?**

The IDP program is designed to engage grassroots organizations that represent communities most impacted by the influence of money in politics and voter suppression (people of color, women and low-income working people) in campaigns to make democracy more representative by elevating race, class and gender equity as fundamental to transforming our democracy.

In most cases, these grassroots groups had not previously led democracy reform advocacy for several reasons:

- Because they lacked the resources;
- Because the field of democracy reform advocates has been dominated by white-led, DC-based organizations; setting the strategy, policy design, funding streams for these reforms, and,
- Because a coherent narrative tying clean elections or democracy reforms to the structural racism, sexism and economic injustice had long been absent, making these reforms less a priority for already under-resourced groups.

Dēmos was uniquely positioned to recruit, train and develop a cohort of racial justice organizations into the broader democracy reform ecosystem for a number of reasons:

1. Dēmos has long been a credentialed democracy reform partner, often engaged both nationally and at the state level for its expertise in democracy reform and voting rights issues.
2. Dēmos is a racial justice organization, who over the years has taken visible steps to make clear its commitment to racial equity both in its organizational development and in its program work.
3. Senior staff within Dēmos have long-standing, deep and non-transactional relationships with a wide array of state and national racial justice organizations that created opportunity and trust for brokering innovations to the democracy reform field.
4. Since Dēmos is not a national field network or intermediary, its leadership of a new cohort in a new issue area across organizational affiliations did not disrupt relationships, create competition or generate tension.

Dēmos' history, gravitas, and relationships helped make the IDP a bridge between grassroots racial justice organizations and the national infrastructure of democracy reform organizations which most often seemed removed or unconnected to the people whose lives it most sought to impact.

A recent video created about the IDP can be viewed by clicking [here](#).

## **How was the IDP structured in the first year?**

The 17 organizations in the IDP cohort were chosen based on a landscape analysis conducted jointly with national democracy reform partners Every Voice, Common Cause, Piper Donors' Collaborative and the Democracy Initiative. The landscape process established four key criteria for selection. National field networks with whom the various state organizations were affiliated including People's Action, PICO, Center for Popular Democracy, Alliance for a Just Society, Jobs With Justice, National Domestic Workers' Alliance, the BOLD network (Black Organizers' Leadership Development) and Movement for Black Lives were also consulted in the process of reaching out to state partners or affiliates.

Each organization selected for the cohort then completed an MOU listing agreements for participation in the program. These agreements included attendance at three week-long convenings (June 2015, Oct 2015, April 2016), participation in two webinars (Feb 2016 and Dec 2015), state level activities to align state infrastructure around shared vision for democracy reform work, fundraising efforts and completion of a brief narrative outlining work to date and next steps.

A number of national capacity building organizations were also consulted in the development of the program and in some cases in its implementation or facilitation. These included: Wellstone, The Management Center, Partnership Fund, Grassroots Policy Solutions, and the Rockwood Leadership Institute.

## **What are the IDP's key goals?**

The key goals of the IDP in this first year were to:

- More closely align racial justice organizations and traditional democracy reform advocates starting in the states.
- To broaden the democracy reform field to include leadership from people of color led grassroots organizations.
- To convene, develop, equip and support a cohort of racial and economic justice organizations to incorporate money in politics work into their existing work to advance a multi-issue progressive agenda.

## **What strategies does the IDP prioritize to accomplish its goals?**

To accomplish these goals, the IDP focused on six key strategies to expand the participation of people of color, women and economic justice leaders in democracy reform advocacy and campaigns:

1. Convening and establishing a cohort of these leaders in order to develop their skills in this area and equip them with the tools to lead democracy reform campaigns locally, to be confident spokespeople for these efforts and to develop relationships between leaders among this cohort that provide mutual support and learning.

2. Increasing and improving the infrastructure campaign finance reform or “clean election” campaigns at the state and local levels by engaging new groups, particularly base-building groups that represent constituencies most impacted by impediments to voting and a dearth of candidates from their own communities.
3. Encouraging and supporting relationships between newly engaged groups and emerging democracy reform leaders and the traditional community of democracy reform groups.
4. Providing technical assistance and guidance to develop, fundraise for and win democracy reform and voting rights campaigns among the groups participating in the cohort.
5. Training and coaching staff of cohort organizations to expand their organization’s work into democracy reform advocacy, to engage new people of color, women and working class leaders in this work and, in some cases, facilitating relationships between cohort groups and established groups in the democracy reform community.
6. Working in partnership with cohort groups on a longer-term strategy for increasing resources and participation of the most impacted voters in democracy reform and voting rights campaigns and a more robust role for these organizations in initiating, winning and implementing policy change.

In the first 14 months of the IDP, Dēmos moved over \$480,000 to state organizations in the form of general operating support to have executive and senior staff participate in the program and develop permanent capacity to institutionalize democracy reform as part of participating organizations strategy to advance racial, gender and economic equity and build independent political power. In addition, financial resources were provided to support specific campaigns being conducted in key states, and were structured to support partners to meet deliverables for specific public financing and voting rights campaigns.

## **ASSESSMENT & ANALYSIS**

From June-September of 2016, Dēmos collected data through a comprehensive survey of cohort participants in preparation for an assessment of their IDP program that could both provide measures of progress on outcomes and lessons that could be applied in future phases of the program. This survey data was combined with participant and stakeholder feedback collected during the first 14 months of program, and independent interviews with Dēmos staff and cohort members, in order to generate this independent analysis of the first year of the program.

### **How did IDP participants rate the program overall?**

Participation in each aspect of the IDP program was high: over two-thirds of the cohort members participated in all three 3-4 day convenings and both webinars, in addition to weekly or monthly check-ins between each organization and Demos staff. Feedback on these elements and the overall experience of participation in the cohort was overwhelmingly positive with over

80% of respondents to the survey rating their experience as excellent and the remainder rating it as very good. Over 96% of program participants would recommend the IDP to colleagues and allies.

Foremost, the participants found value in the opportunity to gather to learn, build relationships and strategize across states about how people of color led and racial justice can engage in democracy reform campaigns and create a shift in the current paradigm toward greater inclusivity of racial and economic equity in those efforts. People of color leaders and white leaders in the cohort both noted the value of the IDP program and cohort in establishing dedicated space for candid analysis of race, gender and class that allowed for safe agitation among peers and real deal discussion about moving forward. Respondents surveyed universally agreed that the time spent building relationships through the IDP was important; over two-thirds (69.4%) strongly agreed that they had built important relationships with others in the cohort and with national allies that would enable closer work in the future, and over 96% of cohort members indicated the experience would facilitate their leadership on future democracy reform campaigns.

***This is an important space to be with and among other people who understand the critical role of centrally placing racial justice in a much larger context of finally achieving governing power. It's a safe space to both challenge your own thinking as well as the thinking of others while gaining access to critical information and tools for systemic change.- Janine Carreiro, MCAN***

As part of this project, Dēmos developed a key tool, its [strategy paper](#), which outlines how grassroots racial and economic organizations can use democracy reforms as part of building independent power and achieving racial and economic equity in their states. This research proved useful to program participants: 50% of survey respondents rated it as very useful and the remaining 50% characterized the document as extremely useful. This tool is now broadly available and being shared and used by additional groups including the State Voices Network, Sierra Club, 350.org, People's Action, and Maine People's Alliance.

Across the board, participants also provided enthusiastic and complimentary feedback about the program facilitators and particularly its designer [Jodeen Olguin-Taylor](#), who they overwhelmingly characterized as a strategic thinker, trusted partner, thoughtful facilitator and insightful partner in the process.

***Jodeen's strategic mind, and ability to operate on multiple levels of strategy (campaign, field, political, advocacy, fundraising, organizational positioning) all at the same time and help us see and digest how they are connected is a rare leadership skill.***

### **Did the IDP program meet its goals for its first year of the project?**

Unanimous feedback from the groups demonstrates that the IDP program did achieve its goal of building a community of grassroots racial and economic justice leaders that recognize the value of incorporating democracy reform advocacy into their work:

- All groups agreed they had greater understanding about how affirmative voting rights can be tools for advancing racial equity at the end of the program; 50% of respondents strongly agreed.
- All groups agreed they had deeper understanding of how campaign finance reform or money in politics can be tools for racial equity; 69.2% strongly agreed.
- All groups agreed that the IDP program advanced their own thinking about how both affirmative voting rights and money in politics reforms can advance independent political power for people of color and working class people; 73.1% strongly agree.

Clearly, groups themselves through participation in the program came to an increasingly coherent analysis of why their participation and leadership in democracy reform efforts is consistent with and in many ways fundamental to achieving greater racial and economic equity for their members.

***Initially I viewed money in politics and voting campaigns as necessary but separate from the work we do around state violence and racial justice, now I view them as vehicles to accelerate our work and the building of capacity. - Montague Simmons, Organization for Black Struggle***

Compiled survey data shows that groups are, in fact, also better equipped to engage in money in politics, campaign finance reform and voting rights campaigns evidencing that the program didn't just influence thinking, it developed capacity and confidence among groups to implement the analysis:

- Every participant agreed that the IDP project helped them develop their analysis, tools and leadership skills to align *other* organizations in the state to adopt racial equity values to democracy reform; 53.4% strongly agreed.
- Every participant agreed that the IDP increased their organization's capacity to execute a long-term strategy to build independent political power with a racial justice lens; 60% strongly agreed.

***I feel the IDP has given me and my organization more tools to make this a reality. I am looking forward to the next several years where I hope in Missouri we can use democracy reform campaigns to build and expand the leadership of organizations of color and working class organizations and can win progressive policy changes as a result of winning democratic reforms. - Justin Stein, MO Jobs With Justice***

Finally, the surveys revealed that in addition to deepening the way leaders think about democracy reforms as a tool for racial justice and increasing their confidence to develop program and organize allies, the IDP also influenced the participants behavior—another key goal of this program.

Groups in the cohort actually took on campaigns that met the very criteria discussed in the IDP convenings and webinars and successfully engaged in those efforts with support and technical assistance from the IDP program. In this way, the IDP program did meet its goal of broadening the democracy reform field to include leadership from people of color led grassroots organizations. Two prominent examples are below:

- In 2015, less than two months into their conversations with Dēmos about the IDP, WA-CAN reversed their decision to sit-out public financing campaign ballot initiative in Seattle, WA, and instead brought partner OneAmerica to the table as part of the executive committee to help shape the policy proposal to include specific attention to racial equity in the campaign. Dēmos presented at their board and membership meetings to secure the board's support for WA-CAN to prioritize the campaign, and provided \$45,000 in general operating support that allowed WA-CAN to staff up to work on the campaign (something the several other independent analysis of the campaign sighted as key to the overall campaign's success). The measure won in November, 2015. In WA-CAN's own words: *"We at WA-CAN wouldn't have continued to work on democracy reform work if we hadn't had this opportunity to work with the other racial justice organizations trying to figure out how to change this field."*
- New Florida Majority (NFM) joined the cohort two months in to the project's launch, spurred by partner Faith in Florida (already a member of the cohort), which recognized the need for more racial justice organizations to lead an upcoming Miami-Dade public financing effort. Dēmos enlisted a host of national allies, provided \$60K of financial resources, and organized additional financial support, and marshaled their own expertise to help New Florida Majority become one of the campaign's key leaders and continues to work closely with NFM. In NFM Executive Director Gihan Perera's own words: *"We've been deep in the voter rights work from the racial justice perspective for a long time, but been puzzled by the silos and divides between impacted people and the white infrastructure. Dēmos created a bridge by bringing resources, technical assistance and strategic support: it was a bridge to the heart of money in politics world."*

Other groups in the cohort reported being in various stages of increasing their organization's involvement and leadership in their states' democracy reform activities. Among the total participants in the cohort, over two-thirds reported taking some specific action to talk to allies/partners about elevating racial equity, bringing racial justice groups or people-of-color led organizations to the table and influencing strategy by pushing for reforms that affirmatively

address racial and economic equity. Over time, it is reasonable to assume that this increased participation from racial justice and economic justice groups will continue to diversify the democracy reform community and create increased opportunities for even more similar organizations to step forward into this work.

### **What limitations or lessons were identified for future consideration?**

The greatest limitation in IDP's program that emerged from the data collected from cohort respondents was lack of concrete progress on fundraising. There was not sufficient specific accounting or feedback from groups on what amounts they raised or how their fundraising developed as a result of participation in the program though groups consistently identified it as a stumbling block.

***If people of color are not included in the funding conversations we simply continue to perpetuate the current system that promotes white supremacy. - Delvone Michael, Working Families Party***

Groups also identified fundraising as a key reason why IDP should continue to work to align funders, traditional democracy reform groups and grassroots organizations that are emerging as new leaders in the field. Based on survey responses:

- 84.6% of participants said IDP's support for racial justice organizations with seed funding for work on democracy reform was "extremely critical."
- 84.6% of participants said IDP's support for racial justice groups to develop their own funder and donor relationships and their own capacity to raise direct support had been "extremely critical."
- 96.2% of respondents said IDP's role in aligning democracy funders to recognize and position racial justice organizations as necessary leaders in the reform field continues to be "extremely critical."

Another ambiguity suggested by the survey results is the degree of focus that should be devoted to encouraging mainstream or white-led organizations to improve their relationships with racial justice organizations or to align with them more. Less than half of respondents felt that it is an extremely critical role for IDP to move traditional allies to support racial equity as a priority. Overall the feedback suggests that groups believe the way to elevate racial, gender and class equity is actually to focus equipping grassroots groups with tools, resources and opportunities to facilitate their own participation and leadership in democracy reform efforts. Interviews with Dēmos staff yielded some excitement about the willingness of traditional groups to engage in the landscape project to select groups, but at the same time acknowledged that it will be a slower process than anticipated to actually get the traditional democracy reform groups to welcome the new cohort leaders to the table.

***It's not easy, but given their depth, power and resources, the reality is that we need alignment with white led or just economic justice groups so they see the intersectionality AND do something about it. - Analilia Mejia, Working Families Party***

Related to this question is the challenge of capacity to meet the growing interest/demand—another limitation of this project. There are already indications of appetite for an expanded community of racial justice organizations who would see value to incorporating democracy reforms in their mission and program, and Dēmos would have to significantly augment its staffing to be able to meet the needs and support requests the project has generated from this first wave of participants.

Dēmos has already identified opportunities to work with an expanded universe of allies to align racial justice with affirmative democracy reform strategies including:

- drafting the Voting Rights and Campaign Finance Reform Sections of the #Vision4BlackLives national policy platform,
- working with staff to present workshops to all of the affiliates of the newly formed People’s Action on these issues
- expanding work within PICO beyond the three existing organizations who were part of the first cohort
- on-going and support to the people-of-color caucus within the Working Families Party.
- accepting invitations to expand this work to a deep dive with organizations in California and New Mexico, and running a racial equity learning program for a state donor’s table.

The question of expansion will need to be carefully considered based on what states may present opportunities for legislative policy change beyond ballot measures, what organizations may or may not meet the criteria the program has identified and, of course, Dēmos’ staff capacity and resources to manage a broader set of stakeholders while maintaining existing relationships with cohort leaders and providing support on efforts already underway.

Both participants in the cohort and Dēmos staff identified time as a key challenge in the program. Some participants noted that one year is not long enough to reach the level of alignment required to put in place the relationships, shared analysis, resources, etc. required to advance a democracy reform effort. Depending on the state, even more time may be required. A number of participants in the program also noted that more time together, more frequent contact between convenings and webinars and more structured opportunity to interact with other IDP participants would be helpful in accelerating the pace of progress and reaching both the individual and collective goals of cohort groups.

A key lesson for Dēmos is not to underestimate the investment of time this kind of intervention necessitates. Dēmos staff noted that it took more time to build the cohort, prepare participants, and provide the level of ongoing support required both to get campaigns off the ground and to keep up with campaigns already moving than they initially anticipated.

Timelines and pace are important considerations as Dēmos contemplates the next phase of its IDP and opportunities to work with an expanded set of stakeholders. Limited capacity and growing demand among groups may require Dēmos to explore other models or hybrid

expressions of IDP where Dēmos may play different roles than in this original iteration of the program.

## **CONCLUSION**

The IDP represents the first phase in Dēmos longer-term effort to conduct a focused intervention in the democracy reform field that could expand progressive power to advance racial, gender and economic equity by creating affirmative reforms that increase voter participation and combat the insidious influence of corporate money in our democracy.

It's clear from the feedback of participants and the growing enthusiasm of grassroots groups that there is tremendous possibility for increasing power to drive democracy reforms by connecting those reforms with race, class and gender equity and building independent political power so that grassroots groups can engage their members in advocacy efforts. Through the IDP, Dēmos has begun to build a model that does just that. Moreover, it does so by engaging groups that organize the most impacted people, equipping those groups to lead on democracy reform campaigns and supporting those groups in facilitating alignment between racial justice organizations and traditional democracy advocates.

This modest-sized effort is an important first step, but continued work is required to expand fundraising capacity, to follow through with state groups on the implementation of the analysis they adopt in the IDP, and to increase the scale of work so that we can start to see discernable shifts in the democracy reform landscape in more places. There is no question that the IDP met its goals in varying degrees in the first year. The real question is how to leverage this success for continued progress, investment and expansion of this model as a key strategy to win, implement and defend the policy change essential to building a democracy in which we all have a say.

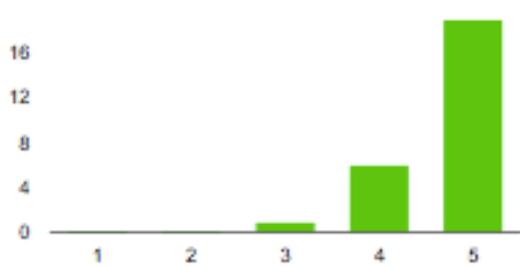
## APPENDIX

### Survey Participants

Name	Title	Organization	Region
Dan McGrath	Executive Director	Take Action MN	MN
Janine Carreiro	Deputy Director	MCAN	MA
Montague Simmons	Chairman	Organization for Black Struggle	MO
Serena Perez	Organizing Director	New Florida Majority	FL
Andrea Serrano	Deputy Director	OLE New Mexico	NM
Toby Guevin	Political Director	One America	WA
Mone Holder	Policy Director	New Florida Majority	FL
Sarah Silva	Executive Director	Café	NM
Analilia Mejia	State Director	Working Families Party New Jersey	NJ
Javier Benavidez	Executive Director	SWOP	NM
Valerie Ervin	National Director	Working Families Party	National
Vina Kay	Executive Director	Voice for Racial Justice	MN
Justin Stein	Lead Organizer	Missouri Jobs with Justice	MO
Jamil Jackson	Executive Director	CEO	MN
Mauricio Ayon	Political Director	WA-CAN	WA
Ashli Bolden	Organizing Director	Missouri Jobs with Justice	MO
Robert Peters	Political Director	The People's Lobby/Reclaim Chicago	IL
Delvone Michael	State Director	Working Families Party Washington, DC	DC
Chris Genese	Organizing Director	WA-CAN	WA
Justin Terrell	Restore the Vote Director	Take Action MN	MN
Desmond Meade	Director	Florida Coalition for Voting Rights/Faith in FL	FL
Charly Carter	State Director	Working Families Party Maryland	MD
Maria Elena	Executive Director	Neighbor to Neighbor	MA

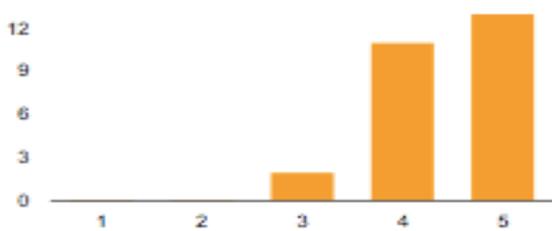
### IDP Overall Evaluation Form & Survey Data Results

As an organizational leader, **this project has advanced my thinking on how affirmative voting rights and/or money in politics reforms can be used strategically, to build INDEPENDENT political power for people of color and working class people:** *(For individual comments see the appendix)*



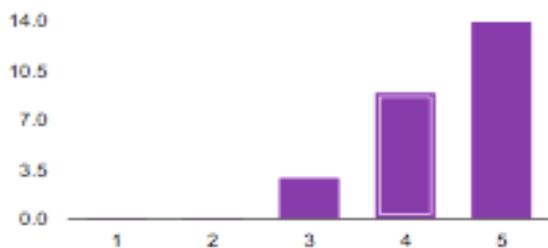
Strongly Disagree:	0%
Disagree:	0%
Agree:	3.8% (1)
Strongly Agree:	23.1% (6)
Strongly Agree & would repeat with my staff:	73.1% (19)

**Participating in the IDP has strengthened my / my organization’s capacity to execute a long-term strategy to build independent political power and, particularly, to do so with a racial justice lens:** *(\*See appendix for specific comments from respondents)*



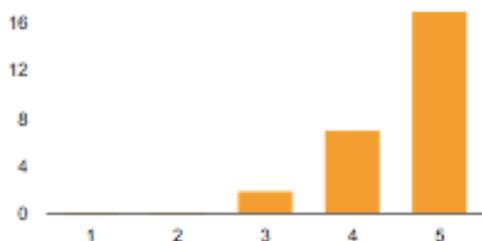
Strongly Disagree:	0%
Not particularly:	0%
Yes, somewhat:	7.7% (2)
Agree:	42.3% (11)
Strongly Agree:	50% (13)

The IDP project has **helped me develop my analysis, set of tools and leadership to align other organizations in my state around bringing racial equity values to democracy reform work:** *\*For individual comments see the appendix*



Strongly Disagree:	0%
Disagree:	0%
Agree:	11% (3)
Strongly Agree:	34.6% (9)
Strongly Agree & would repeat with my staff:	53.8% (19)

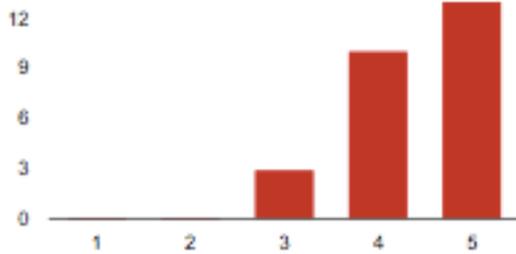
**I have built and strengthened relationships among and between my fellow IDP cohort members so we can work together more effectively—within states and nationally:**



Strongly Disagree:	0%
Not particularly:	0%
Yes, somewhat:	7.7% (2)
Agree:	26.9% (7)
Strongly Agree:	65.4% (17)

*\*For individual comments see the appendix*

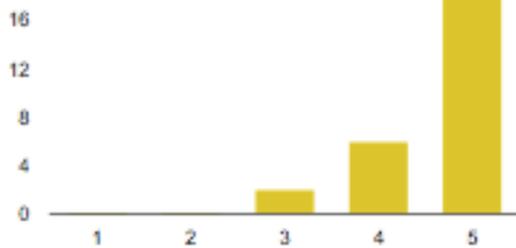
**I have a deeper understanding now, then when the project started a year ago, about how affirmative voting rights reforms can be tools for advancing racial equity:**



Strongly Disagree:	0%
Not particularly:	0%
Yes, somewhat:	11.5% (2)
Agree:	38.5% (10)
Strongly Agree:	13% (50)

*\*For individual comments see the appendix*

**I have a deeper understanding now, then when the project started a year ago about how campaign finance or money in politics reforms can be tools for advancing racial equity:**



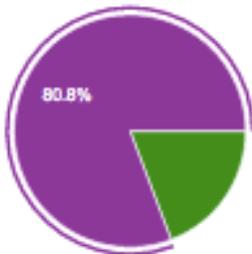
Strongly Disagree:	0%
Not particularly:	0%
Yes, somewhat:	3.8% (1)
Agree:	23.1% (6)
Strongly Agree:	73.1% (19)

*\*For in individual comments see the appendix*

**How useful did you find the project’s strategy paper about how to use democracy reforms as part of a strategy to build governing power & independent political power? (Please check all that apply)**

Only Somewhat Useful:	0%
Very Useful:	50% (13)
Extremely Useful:	50% (13)
I shared it with my staff / others:	50% (13)
I use or refer to it regularly:	53.8% (14)

**Overall, I feel my experience with the Inclusive Democracy Project has been:**



Poor:	0%
Fair:	0%
Average:	0%
Very Good:	19.2 (5)
Excellent:	80.8% (21)

*“...[W]hat Demos is doing with the IDP is our version of what the conservative movement did 40 years ago...we have needed an organization that has the right analysis, strategy, and agenda to bring together grassroots groups throughout the country to really look towards taking back governing power. There are a number of other spaces where this conversation is happening, but I have yet to find one that has the clarity, integrity, political analysis, and intelligence DEMOS has crafted with the IDP...”*